Strategic Issue # 5

How can the Chaplain Service better manage religious accommodation?

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Religious Accommodation

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- DODD 1300.17 Policy
  - “Requests for accommodation of religious practices should be approved by commanders when accommodation will not have an adverse impact on military readiness, unit cohesion, standards, or discipline.”

Religious Accommodation

- Commander's role (the only one who has the authority to grant a request and is advised to consider the following)
  - The importance of military requirements in terms of individual and unit readiness, health and safety, discipline, morale and cohesion
  - The religious importance of the accommodation of the requestor
  - The cumulative impact of repeated accommodations of a similar nature
  - Alternative means available to meet the requested accommodation
  - Previous treatment of the same or similar requests made for other than religious reasons

Religious Accommodation

- Commander's Options
  - Accommodate
  - Negotiate

- When the commander determines the request for accommodation is not in the best interest of the unit and tension exists between the service member and the unit
  - Reassignment
  - Reclassification
  - Separation

Religious Accommodation

- Wing Chaplain's Role
  - Consider the five criteria used in DoDD 1300.17
  - Special focus on religious importance to the individual
  - Special focus on alternative means available

- Additionally
  - What are the community norms?
  - How will the decision affect morale?
  - What are the paramount beliefs and practices of the religion?

Religious Accommodation

- Rabbi Drazen
  - Most cases can be resolved
    - Catch them before they get out of hand and hit the next stage
    - Talk to the commander
      - Mediate and help conduct analysis
      - Make CC sensitive to individual's needs
      - Must think of chaplain in free exercise role
      - If chaplains do not accommodate…chaplains, not outsiders, will destroy the CS if airmen's free exercise rights are not protected.

Religious Accommodation

- Current Issues from the field
  - Muslim handshake with women in the military services
  - Tongue splitting (Pagan Priests)
  - Praying in the name of Jesus
  - Accommodating each other

Religious Accommodation

- “The free exercise of religion to me is the most important freedom for all of us.”
- “The freedom of religion is expressed much differently in other countries and militaries. Many foreign military services have chaplains to take care of their countries core religions, but leave minority religious groups to fend for themselves. In the United States, I’m here to take care of everyone.”
- “Our bottom line is the free exercise of religion for everyone, whether they believe as I do or not.”

Chaplain, Major General Lorraine K. Potter